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**GOLD RUSH MEMOIR OF JOHN H. TOWNES,
BROOKVILLE, INDIANA
INCLUDING AN ACCOUNT OF A TRIP TO CINCINNATI
BY CANOE IN 1849**

[Owned in the 1960s by John Goodwin,
Brookville, Indiana]

Copied in the 1960s for the collection of the
Allen County Public Library by Fred J. Reynolds

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John H. Towners
Book

70
Taken from a
Journal of a Two
years residence on the
Isthmus of Darien
or Panama and
the journey there and back

Alface

Having kept, during my two years residence in New Granada, an singular journal of the most important events which came under my observation, with some little account of the character and habits of the people among whom it was my fortune to reside for so long a period, I have determined for the accommodation of my friends, to attempt a compilation of most of the principal events, with such alterations as I may deem proper, the original journal being very imperfect, having been mostly written when I was labouring under the effects of the great malady of the country - Chagras fever, and my mind having for the time been somewhat weakened by that fearful disease, this book will probably not be so interesting, it would have been had I enjoyed good health, and my memory not impaired; - such as it is, however I submit it, trusting to the charity of my friends to excuse all errors.

Chapter I

The school at Brookville - Attacked by the California Gold fever - Went with a company for California - Arrive at Cincinnati - Trip down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers - Arrival at New-Orleans - New-Orleans' Boarding houses - Shipping - Theatre &c

During the winter of 1848-50. I attended a school at Brookville kept by a Mr Bent of Boston. There were about eight or nine of us young fellows of from seventeen to twenty years of age, and we managed to enjoy ourselves pretty well, as study was the last thing to which we devoted a thought. Mr Bent was one of those peculiar characters with whom we sometimes, and in fact not infrequently met, during this earthly pilgrimage, who has no thought of a mind nor fixedness of purpose whatever, and although from the first he must have seen that we were making no progress in learning, yet he allowed us throughout the entire winter to sit up stairs far remote from the school room where we had every opportunity of planning and carrying into effect any species of mischief which might present itself to our mischievous minds, and among these the pranks which we played off on the unoffending schoolmaster to the infinite amusement of ourselves and the whole school, for the teacher was so unoffensive that it will be readily supposed that even the smaller scholars had very little respect for him - but I am digressing and beg your pardon for so doing.

During school hours we frequently procured newspapers, and read the California news, which always interested us very much, and California was frequently a theme of conversation for our whole brotherhood and about the 1st of January 1850

I found that I had a very severe attack of the cold fever. There was another young man in the school of about my own age, with whom I had been intimate from childhood, who was attacked with the same malady at the same time, and we determined on going the next spring.

In the meantime however, a company of seven or eight of fifteen was raised to stay in Edinburgh, and we concluded to accompany them, but as father obtained it my friend was never permitted to go, for about a week prior to the departure of the company an accident happened to his method, which immediately settled the matter.

I will pass over the admiration of mother, kindred and friends, and listen for this is a subject which even at this distant day is far from agreeable to dwell upon. The memory of this kind advice, and my mother's impulsive warning to abstain from all vice - and how this advice was carried out and acted upon, now that all is passed is a subject of painful reflection; but I will no longer weary your patience with these tedious details but resume my subject.

On the 21st day of February 1850 I bid farewell to home, Mother, kindred and friends and started off on my little pilgrimage. I carry now the doubts I then entertained, whether I should ever behold that mother home, and those friends again, and I actually came very near backing out to use a vulgar phrase, when it came to the point. It was very hard to withstand the love and pleadings of my mother, and I now say with shame that only the fear of the frowns of my companions and friends prevailed and forced according to her wishes.

and disinclining, forced them at least during
her lifetime, the idea of going to California.
The fear of ridicule, however overruled my sense of
duty, and I bid my mother good bye, and depart-
ed.

We took passage on a canal boat to Cincinnati
and many was the hearty shake of the hands, and
heart felt farewell which greeted us from the citizens
of Brockville, as we stepped aboard the boat. At
eight o'clock A.M. we started, and I then
had an opportunity of seeing how many of the
original company, were with me. I
found Mr. Fane, L. Power, Lewis Lynde, Richard
McClure, John W. Cheney, Robert Sampson jr.,
and Richard J. Lebrun aboard, several of the com-
pany, having, backed out, and others having gone
on to Cincinnati in advance of us. With sev-
eral of those on the boat I had not the slight-
est acquaintance, and in fact did not know
until that morning that they were going with us;
however I soon picked up an acquaintance with
the whole party, and found them a very agreeable
set of fellows, and we should have a many times
of it that day, but at the memory of the scene
we had just left, was too fresh in the minds of
the greater part of us.

At twelve o'clock three miles before Brockville I
was met by my grandfather, my uncle J. S.
McCarthy, and some three or four of my friends
who bid me farewell in as solemn a manner as
they could have assumed had I been on my way
to the scaffold. To be banded, two of my friends
accompanied me as far as Webster three miles
further down, where they bid me adieu. I then
truly felt like a stranger in a strange land
for I did not expect to see another familiar
face, with the exception of those with me, for years
if ever. But in this I was disappointed as
you shall see. The Little Abail (for such was

the name of the canal boat in which we had
taken passage, commanded by our Billings, Pil-
lots, glided slowly along through the plates
drifting, and however every sixteenth fathom a-
way from our home. During the afternoon
we endeavored to amuse ourselves by firing our
pistols at different objects along the lakes, but
it ~~was~~ would have been plainly dis-
cernable to any disinterested observer that
other thoughts than of the objects around us
occupied our minds. We passed the little
river of Harrison at about three o'clock P.M.
and arrived at Wharfedale at about seven
P.M. where we remained some time in the house.
At about nine o'clock I retired to my berth
after exacting a promise from some of the
hands to awaken me when we arrived at the
tunnel, which is about a mile farther to
bein Wharfedale - expecting of course to sleep.
But sleep would not come over me, and af-
ter sitting and tossing about for some time
I arose and dressed myself; the boat was
then under headway, and we soon arrived at
the entrance of the tunnel. This subterranean
passage is, to the best of my belief, about a
quarter of a mile in length, being dug through
a large hill. It is a damp and gloomy place
and is not calculated to produce very pleas-
ant sensations; in many places the water
drips through from above to such an extent
as to resemble a shower of rain. There were
scaffolds overhead, by which means boats were
pulled through. I remained on deck during our
passage through this gloomy place, having de-
termined to see everything which was to be seen.
After passing through the tunnel (it being a
long half past eleven) and beautiful scenery
of the canal, we visited the tomb of the in-
mortal Harrison, which is situated about 40

on a beautiful grassy eminence overlooking the town
Shiraz, and the surrounding country for miles; and
about two hundred yards from the canal.
Accordingly, the boat stopped, and I ascended the
hill accompanied by two others of the party; on
arriving, at the summit we passed by two caves
sent to take a survey of the beautiful scenery
which surrounded us; at the foot of the hill on one
side of us rolled the waters of "The Silke River"
resembling in the bright moonlight, a broad sheet
of silver, and on the other the canal, around its
serpentine course through the rich lands of the ex-
General's heirs; on the opposite side of the river the
dimly seen in the distance looked boldly up in
bold relief - the hills of old Kutchik, whilst the
puffing hoarse puffing of a solitary steamer, as
she moved like a floating palace over the broad bosom
of the river was all that disturbed the perfect
silence which reigned around us; but our time
was short, and we did not remain long to view
the enchanting scene, but passed on to take a glance
at the tomb which contained the remains of the
deceased hero. It is but a simple brick vault
with nothing to give it interest save the beaut-
y of the surrounding scenery, and the thought that
within its dark cell repose the remains of one
whose will live forever in the hearts of the Amer-
ican people as a true patriot, and a true and gal-
lant soldier. Some miserable wretches had defaced the
decor leading to the vault by carving the initials of their
names in the wood, having perhaps despaired of ever rais-
ing their reputations in any other way than by violating
the sanctity of the dead.
We had not much time to look about us for we soon
heard the voice of the boatman warning us that we
must hasten back to the boat. I still lingered, how-
ever, until my companions had gone and was only
awakened from my reverie by the shouts of one
party, which gave me the very agreeable intelli-

gender that if I did not make haste I should
have the pleasure of walking to Cincinnati.
I then hurried down the hill and regained
the boat just in time to keep from being
left.

We passed the old homestead of the General
shortly after starting, but as it was
situated some distance from the canal
we had a very indistinct view of it in the
dim twilight.

It must have been over o'clock in the morn-
ing when I again sought my berth, but
that it was a long time before I could
sleep, for it may be easily imagined that
my thoughts were not of the most pleas-
ant description. I was at that time but
eighteen years of age, and had but that
evening bid farewell to all I held most
dear in earth to try my fortune as
young stranger in a strange land. You
will not, then, wonder that Morpheus was
somewhat slow to take me in his em-
brace.

However I at length succeeded in get-
ting to sleep, and did not wake until
about seven o'clock the next morning, when
I found that we had arrived at the Den-
ver City.

We were here joined by the following
persons, all, I believe, from Franklin County:
Mr. John M. Gordon, Jacob Bates,
Samuel Wadsworth and son, Harison M.
McGinnis, James Gurdie, John and Lu-
cia, James Hubbard, & William Gammis.

After getting some breakfast we paid
a visit to the Steamboat Landing, where
we engaged passage to New Orleans in
the steamer Columbia, an new and very hand-
some vessel. We then returned up town, and

Still as the boat was not to start until nine o'clock that evening.

I first fulfilled a promise which I had made at Buckhills, to call upon Mrs Jane Powers, a daughter of Dr. McQuay, and wife of the same name (a brother of William Powers, the well known American Artist) to convey any letters or messages which she might wish to send to her husband and son who were then in California.

After making this call, I amused myself during the rest of the forenoon by visiting the market, boat landings, &c. and at noon found myself at the residence of Samuel McQuay, who formerly kept boarding house on Mill St. Buckhills. I ate dinner there, as did also most of the remainder of our company; After dinner I found the son of Mrs Powers in the sitting room with a letter for me to take, to take charge of. I will here state that I sent this letter by Billingsley Roberts the Canal boat Captain of whom I took a page or two back - now Panama as I saw him there some two months afterwards, on his way to California. Whether it ever reached Mrs Powers I am unable to state as I have never since seen any of the parties concerned, but to return. After I had in conversation with William Powers (for he was named after his uncle, the artist, the young man who brought me the letter, I said or wrote to the office of the Cincinnati Commercial, where Howard White, Hyer and William Holcomb, two journeyman printers who had been brought up principally at Buckhills after seeing every thing of note about this Great Establishment all proceeded to pay a visit to the "Art Union" a gallery devoted to painting and sculpture, as I have extremely anxious to see the "Greek Slave" which was then on exhibition, and cannot say that notwithstanding the highly wrought description which I

had been in the bust. A reading for months prior
to that time of this wonderful sculpture of "American
Genius," that it far surpassed even any extravagant
expectations; there is not a muscle nor even a ripple,
unusually perceptible in the human form but is fully
portrayed in this exquisite symmetry and perfection
of this beautiful statue.



